

her colleagues. It is long past time the Biden administration revisit this decision and send us somebody who fits that description.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

#### INVESTING IN A NEW VISION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND SURFACE TRANSPORTATION IN AMERICA ACT—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3684, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3684) to authorize funds for Federal-aid highways, highway safety programs, and transit programs, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Schumer (for Sinema) amendment No. 2137, in the nature of a substitute.

Carper-Capito amendment No. 2131 (to amendment No. 2137), to strike a definition.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, this week, the Senate has been considering historic infrastructure legislation.

We have seen a lot of positives in this process. Twenty-two amendments have been processed, and 12 of those amendments have been adopted. Many of those are bipartisan amendments that our fellow Senators have worked on together.

On Thursday, we saw the process hit a snag. We have colleagues who sincerely want to debate their remaining amendments, but we had objections that prevented our votes from moving forward. In my view, that is unfortunate. I want everybody's voice to be heard because a number of the amendments awaiting action would actually improve this legislation, and, again, we have consensus on both sides on that. I hope we can reach agreement on a package of amendments that can receive votes before we pass this bill in final.

In particular, I support an amendment that Senator CORNYN from Texas would like to offer to allow States to use previously appropriated COVID funding to finance infrastructure projects.

When I began negotiating with the White House in April and May, this was one of the things that I put on the table with the President, and I know the G-20 has also had this on the table with the President. So it has been a topic of great discussion both here in the Senate but also with the White House as well. The Cornyn-Padilla amendment would unlock tens of billions of dollars—more for highway,

transit, and housing infrastructure—without adding to the cost of this legislation.

I plan to vote for cloture at 12 noon because this infrastructure legislation makes important investments in our Nation's future. I am a West Virginian, and all West Virginians and all Americans will benefit from the roads, bridges, water infrastructure, broadband, and other modes of core infrastructure that would be financed through this bill, but I believe something more foundational than infrastructure is at stake here.

We need to demonstrate to the American people that we can work together in this Congress to pass major legislation that benefits our country and, I might add, legislation that we have passed more than a few times in the past. Infrastructure is that perfect place to do that.

Senator CARPER and I led the Environment and Public Works Committee with the surface transportation reauthorization bill, and the Presiding Officer is on that committee. We passed that out of our committee with unanimous support, and we also passed a drinking water bill that passed out of our committee with unanimous support but also out of this body with 89 votes. Both of those bills are included in this package in their entirety. Bipartisan bills reported by Commerce and the Energy Committees are also included.

I certainly appreciated Chairman CARPER's leadership and partnership throughout the entire process. I appreciate the efforts of our colleagues in the G-22 who have worked with each other tirelessly and with the Biden administration to get us to this point.

We will soon have a chance to advance this infrastructure legislation toward final passage. Is this bill perfect? No—no compromise legislation ever is—but it will make a big difference in modernizing our country's infrastructure. More than that, we will demonstrate that both Republicans and Democrats can come together and do big things that move our country forward.

I have just a bit of a recitation to remind folks what is in this bill. I will try to speed this part up.

The bill provides \$303.5 billion over 5 years for Federal highway programs—a 35-percent increase. That investment represents historic funding for our roads and bridges and provides States with the long-term certainty that they need and flexibility that they need to complete projects.

The bill ensures that 90 percent of the funding is distributed by formula—very predictable. It gives the States the certainty they need to prioritize their projects. For West Virginia, that means over \$3 billion over 5 years. That is a huge investment for our State and much needed.

This bill also creates something that I am passionate about, the Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program to

award \$2 billion in competitive grants over 5 years to improve and expand roads and bridges in rural America. I am especially excited that this program has a 25-percent set-aside for projects that support the completion of the Appalachia Development Highway System, otherwise known as ADHS. That set-aside means ADHS projects in West Virginia are eligible to compete for \$500 million over 5 years in discretionary grants. This package will move our Corridor H project along significantly because we know that that project will be getting \$195 million, and this grant program opens up the possibility of more. This is a vital connection in our State for our tourism and our economy. It also will open us up even broader to the east coast.

West Virginia will receive \$506 million to refund and repair our State's bridges, addressing a critical need certainly in our State and across the Nation. This funding is part of the single largest investment in bridge infrastructure since the construction of the Interstate Highway System.

Briefly, the bill recognizes that broadband is core infrastructure and prioritizes unserved communities. This is the area I have gotten really the most questions about: What is this going to do for West Virginia, for the digital divide areas that are still unserved?

Today, education, tourism, healthcare all rely on high internet speeds. I launched my Capito Connect Initiative in 2015 to help expand broadband infrastructure in our State. Many communities that lack adequate broadband are already struggling economically. It is impossible to compete for jobs if a community cannot offer good internet service, causing these areas to fall even further behind. And I will say, since the pandemic, rural America—as we have known who live in rural America—is a great and wonderful place to live. More people in congested areas are realizing there are a lot more pluses in rural America than what, maybe, they might have realized over a year ago.

The bill invests \$65 billion to help fix our country's digital divide. That funding would support a formula-based grant program to States and also supports competitive grants, like the USDA's ReConnect Program.

Additionally, this bill makes large investments in clean and safe drinking water; it provides resources that will put West Virginians to work cleaning up our abandoned mines and orphaned wells.

Every Senator could stand here and tell similar stories about the investment that this bill will make in his or her own State. This is the perfect time for us to come together toward the end of a summer that has been full of stops and starts, and we need to pass this legislation that will benefit every American.

I hope my colleagues will join me to advance this important legislation toward its passage.